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Bush mentioned as possible Ford running mate

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WASHINGTON — A spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency said Thursday that CIA Director George Bush has not changed his mind on the vice-presidency — he is not seeking the office and will not become involved in political activities.

The spokesman also said Bush will issue no "politically oriented" statements, although new developments surrounding the fight over the Republican nomination may force him to change his mind.

Bush's name appeared headed toward controversy as a result of an interview with House Minority Leader John Rhodes, R-Ariz., by editors and reporters of the Washington Post.

In the interview, published Thursday morning, Rhodes said after a meeting with President Ford that Bush might be among the favorites for the vice-presidential nomination if the President decides to leave the decision to the convention delegates.

Rhodes added that it is "highly possible" Ford may throw the choice of running mates open to the delegates. The minority leader mentioned Bush, Ronald Reagan and John Connally as possible nominees.

THE PROBLEM with speculation over Bush is that it reflects directly on the concerns of the Senate when Bush was confirmed last January. The major effort at that time was to "depoliticize" the CIA. And Bush was confirmed only after President Ford said in writing

that he would not consider Bush as a running mate in 1976.

"I can tell you that I will not seek any office while I hold the job as CIA Director," Bush said in his opening statement.

However, on the controversial question of his future as a vice-presidential candidate, Bush commented, "I don't think any American should be asked to say he would not accept. To my knowledge, no one in the history of this republic has ever been asked to renounce his political birthright as the price of confirmation for any office."

Critics of any appearance of linking politics to the CIA were not satisfied, causing the President to write a letter to Sen. John Stennis, chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

In the letter, Ford emphasized that he and Bush agreed there should be "continuity in the CIA leadership."

"**THEREFORE**, if Ambassador Bush is confirmed by the Senate as Director of Central Intelligence, I will not consider him as my vice-presidential running mate in 1976," the President said. "He and I have discussed this in detail. In fact, he urged that I make this decision. This says something about the man and about his desire to do this job for the nation."

The letter broke the logjam, although a minority continued to insist in a formal statement that "this particular nomination is likely to have a contrary result since it raises suspicions of political bias and the prospect of short tenure."